

Mental Hygiene agency scored on patient transfers

By DOUGLAS PATRICK

Patients from throughout the city and the state are being discharged by state mental institutions to large propriety homes on Staten Island which are ill-prepared to cope with their special needs, it was charged yesterday.

During a two hour meeting the committee on mental health services of the Staten Island Community Chest and Council, Mrs. Roberta Imre, committee chairman and a senior case worker for the Jewish Family Service, declared:

"In recent years the New York State Department of Mental Hygiene has developed a policy of discharging as many people as possible from state institutions with little or no consideration for their readiness to fend for themselves in the community.

This, she said, is being done without considering the ability of the communities to find staff, as well as finance, the extensive care programs for either real rehabilitation or continuing comprehensive care when needed, including nights, weekends and holidays.

"We agree that patients should not languish in back wards of isolated hospitals. However, we are urging that discharge policies be re-evaluated. We would like the assurance that people who are in fact ready for discharge will go to communities ready and

able to receive them," Mrs. Imre stressed.

A heated dispute arose last month between members of the community and the owners of the Klein's Manor in Brighton Heights after a proposal was made to provide psychiatric after-care for the chronically mentally ill persons in the home. About half of the 114 residents have psychiatric disabilities.

"It is easy to understand that a home for elderly persons in a community does not constitute the same threat as that of housing ex-mental patients or the mentally retarded. I think we are all frightened because of the sheer numbers — numbers of homes and numbers of mental patients," said Mrs. Polly Normann, director of Serve and Enrich.

Those at the meeting in the St. George Library Center auditorium did agree that improved services will demand the coordination efforts of agencies, legislators and a concerned community.

The Mental Hygiene Department came under more fire for not adequately following up after transferring patients into communities by giving them the necessary funds for subsequent care.

"We suggest a reallocation of monies spent by the Department of Mental Hygiene for custodial care — mental health centers to provide and strengthen services

for the mentally ill who must make their way into the community," Sister Mary Assisium of the North Richmond Community Health Center said.

"For every 10 persons released in a community, a person in charge of follow-up service is set up. The money cannot be reallocated, but people paid by the state Department of Mental Hygiene can help. Money doesn't help people; people help people,"

said the assistant commissioner of the Department of Mental Hygiene.

He also noted that the Department of Social Services and not the Department of Mental Hygiene was responsible for licensing and maintaining standards for the new propriety homes.

Many at the meeting felt the city agencies were engaging in passing the buck along instead of doing what they should. One person suggested a meeting should be held after the election to promote more effective legislation to alleviate the problems.